

February 9, 2003
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Help With Addiction”

Matt. 6: 24a

“No one can serve two masters...”

Definition

I reluctantly used the term addictions. When we think of addictions we think of major problems with drugs, alcohol, pornography or some other dangerous dependency. But there are other addictions that can also be destructive. We can be addicted to work, mediocrity, an unhealthy lifestyle. We all have our addictions or bad habit patterns, whether they are “minor” or “major” bad habits.

Would anyone here volunteer to be a slave? Of course not! Yet, that is what an addiction is: self imposed slavery; chained to a life of bondage. It is when one has submitted to the control of something that can become dangerously destructive physically, mentally or spiritually. Ironically the only cure *is* to be controlled. We must submit to the control of God and His Holy Spirit. His control is always for our health and benefit, rather than our destruction.

I think it was Mark Twain who once said, “It’s easy to quit smoking, I’ve done it a hundred times.” I knew people who believed they did not have a problem with addiction because there were able to stay away from their addiction for a few days or possibly a few weeks or even longer. But eventually they were caught right back up in the habit again. The people I’m thinking of as I mention this all eventually died from diseases directly related to their addictions.

The Good News and Our Only Cure

1 Cor 6:9-11

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Did you notice that Paul says, “...that is what some of you *were*”? Past tense! God made a way for these Corinthians to put problems even problems of addiction permanently behind them. And it was Jesus, who by forgiving, washing, and changing them through giving them His Holy Spirit made it possible.

Let me make it clear again that addiction involves more than substance abuse. Peter wrote (2 Peter 2:19), “...you are a slave to *whatever* controls you.” In general, our greatest addiction is to sin. We have all sinned and the only cure for sin is faith in Jesus.

And so, the first thing, vital to getting help, is that you must know God as a child knows his Father. You must first become a member of the family of God. God has promises for His children but you must be one of His children to benefit from His promises. That means you need a second birth. If you are becoming conscious of the fact that you are doing things that are an offense against God (i.e. sin), that you are captive to them, and need forgiveness and power to overcome them, then you need to trust Jesus to be your Savior. How? Acknowledge that you have sinned against God, recognize that Jesus came into the world to forgive and save people from their sin then ask and trust Jesus to forgive and save you. To be saved you must believe that Jesus bore the guilt and the punishment for your sin when He died on the cross. And believe that He was raised from the dead to prove that God accepted His sacrifice as a substitute for you – He took the punishment you deserved and it was acceptable to God confirmed by raising Jesus from the dead.

Change That Sticks

Now let us suppose you have put your trust in Jesus. You know your sins are forgiven. You know you have God's Spirit and you have the hope of Eternal Life. What do you do now? How can Christ change you so that the change sticks?

(Submission to the Holy Spirit)

Remember, if you have accepted Jesus then the Spirit of God now lives in you. But you must choose to submit yourself completely to the control of the Holy Spirit. You can not change unless you are willing to do this. In our text for today Jesus states this truth: "You cannot serve two masters." You can not be devoted to God and devoted to other things too. You must evaluate who or what is most important to you (here is a clue to finding that out: where do you spend most of your time?). The best way to be free from a bad habit is to choose whom you will serve. Submission is a choice. Daily you are faced with choices. You can choose sin or you can choose God's way. Rom 6:16 NLT: "Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval."

Choose God as your Master. God's control is the only control that will have completely positive results. (Rom 8:5-7 NIV: Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace).

(Gal 5:22-23 NLT: But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control.)

The Holy Spirit will help make God's Word (Bible) clear to you. Then you must step out in faith to trust and obey whatever His Word says; not primarily because you want to get rid of a bad habit but primarily because you desire to please God and bring glory to God who has already done so much for you.

(Submission to the Word of God)

So, let's get back to the matter of change that sticks. Why do people often go back to their old ways? What wisdom does God offer in the Bible that makes the difference?

The answer is this: Most try to *quit* a bad habit but the Bible teaches that this is not enough. The Bible teaches that a sinful behavior must not be *stopped*; rather God says that it must be *replaced*. Bad habits must not be *broken*, they must be *replaced* with new and good habits. You are not changed only if currently you've stopped a habit (which usually is temporary). Real change comes by reorganizing and a reorientation of your whole life. And only God, in His Word (Bible), can tell you not only what to stop doing (i.e. what is sin) but only HE can tell you what to do instead. Paul put it this way (Rom 6:19) "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness." In other places Paul says, to *put off* the old and *PUT ON* the new. What is *put on* must replace the behavior and attitudes that are *put off*.

As we have seen in our discussions on anger and worry, what God has given to us for good has become corrupt and used for bad. The fact that we can form habits is a good thing. If it were not for habitual living you would still be home consciously reminding yourself how to brush your teeth or button your shirt (or you would have had to get up much earlier this morning). Because of habits you did much of your preparation for coming this morning while probably thinking of other things. You may even have to think if you did brush your teeth or not. So the ability to form habits is a good thing. And here is more good news. Habits are learned. Therefore we can change by learning new habits, which replace the old ones.

In a Nutshell

Here then is some practical help (these are not steps. Change is hard and will take time. There are no easy formulas.):

1. Admit what is wrong and be willing to turn from it. Ask God to forgive you and receive His forgiveness. Don't make any promises. Don't say, "Forgive me Lord and I will try harder." If you do you miss the point. He does not forgive you because you promise to try harder. He forgives you because you trust in Jesus and His sacrifice for you. Forgiveness is a gift received by faith. Rejoice in the grace (favor) of God given to you because of Jesus.
2. Realize you can not change without His Spirit and Power. Be willing to have His Spirit and only His Spirit control you.
3. Seek God's help in understanding His Word and to enable you to apply it specifically and accurately to your life.
4. Make a list of what God says you must put off and what He says to replace it with (or put on). [e.g. see Eph. 4:

(v28) *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Here we are taught to *put off* stealing and *PUT ON* (replace it with) work so we can give to /share with the needy.

(v26) *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*

Here we are taught to *put off* resentment (holding anger in) and *PUT ON* deal with problems daily.

(v29-30) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Here God's word teaches us to replace unwholesome words that cut others up with words that will build other up.

(v31-32) *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

(Self explanatory)

5. Realize that your addiction or habit has effected every area of your life: Marriage; Family (children); finances; Physical (health, exercise, diet, sleep); work/school; Spiritual (Church, Bible, prayer, witness); Social activities (friends) [you may need to avoid or even cut off connections entirely with those who cause you to be tempted to go back to old ways (1 Cor 15:33- Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."); (there may be some other areas you can think of). Take this list (of put offs and put ons) and apply it to every area.
6. Have a Christian friend (or a Christian counselor) to help, to be accountable to, to pray for you.
7. Make a list of what would hinder your change and what would help you change. What do you need to add to your former sinful ways or remove from the new holy ways? And what do you need to remove from the former sinful ways and add to the new holy ways.

Now that you know what to do...do it! Don't delay; don't wait for tomorrow; start today. With God's help you can change a bad habit by replacing it with a new godly one. It will not be easy, and there will be discouragements. But if you truly trust in Jesus and do as His word instructs, by His grace you will succeed.